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ABSTRACT

The research in this paper was motivated by continuing Soviet claims that the country's language problems have been solved. First, the nature of Soviet nationality policy is reviewed, and then available evidence and the question of linguistic and cultural assimilation of the non-ethnic Russian minorities through Russian language and culture are examined. Various terminology such as "language planning," "politics of language" and "language policy" are discussed. The problem of assimilation is addressed in the context of both demography and language, and the evidence of linguistic domination by the Russian language is demonstrated. It is concluded that because language and culture are inseparable and linguistic assimilation is a reliable precursor of cultural assimilation, there is considerable evidence that the small nationality groups have been assimilated by the Russian language and culture. Although the Soviet Union disclaims an official policy of "Russification," its language policy of gradual "sblizenie" of the non-ethnic Russian minorities has all the appearances of linguistic and cultural assimilation. Contains 22 references. (LB)

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Soviet Language Planning and the Linguistic Assimilation of non-Russian Ethnic Groups in the USSR

CLAUDE O. PROCTOR, Jr.

What is the nature of Soviet language problems and to what extent, if any, have they been solved? Is there any evidence to support the view that the Soviet Union has and continues to pursue a policy of linguistic and cultural assimilation of the non-ethnic Russian minorities?

The research contained in this paper was motivated in two important directions by continuing Soviet claims that the country's language problems have been solved. In the first instance, it reviews the nature of Soviet nationality policy. Secondly, this paper presents the available evidence and examines the question of linguistic and cultural assimilation of the non-ethnic Russian minorities through Russian language and culture.

Language Planning and Terminology

Various terminologies such as *language planning, politics of language* and *language policy* are used to describe the process " in which governments and/or international bodies consciously attempt to assess linguistic needs, problems, and priorities and to establish guidelines whereby these goals may be met" (O'Barr, 1976: 5-6). For all intents and purposes, the term *language planning* is commonly used in Western literature to describe the aforementioned process. Nonetheless, the Soviet lexicon of terminologies and definitions often can be ambiguous and obscure. Soviet linguists commonly employ the terms *language policy* and *language construction* to encompass the concept of language planning: *language policy* is defined as "the theory and practice of a conscious influencing of the course of language development on the part of society," whereas *language construction* is "the creation of written languages, of schools taught in native languages, of orthographies, terminologies, of teaching texts, theoretical studies concerned with all the languages of Soviet people" (Isaev, 1977: 11-14). Thus the distinction between the two Soviet terms exists in the sense of theory: *language policy,* and practice: *language construction*..

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Soviet Nationality Policy

Just as in many other areas of comparative analyses involving the tsarist and Soviet eras, there is a certain historical continuity in language policy as practiced during the Tsarist period prior to 1917 and that of the ensuing Soviet period. At the same time, there are important distinctions. The inherent feature of expansionism on the part of both the Russian and the Soviet states was initiated in the 16th century during the reign of Ivan the Terrible (Lewis, 1973). The momentum created by this initial thrust to the east and south continues even into the 20th century. Consequently, it has resulted in the creation of an immense multinational and multilingual state consisting of some 130 different groups and languages (Comrie, 1981). According to the 1970 Soviet census, ethnic Russians comprised a bare majority of 53.7 percent of the total population of the USSR (ibid.). Current demographic estimates cite a figure of approximately 51 percent. Given the dramatically increasing birth rate in the Central Asian republics and sporadic displays of nationalism in several of the non-Russian republics, the scenario has increasing implications for political stability in the country as well as challenges to the centralized administration of a nationalities policiy.

Tsarist nationality policy differed in several important respects from that introduced and practiced by the Bolshvik government. Most importantly, it has been observed that the Tsarist approach to the nationality problem consistently pursued a dual policy of ruthless assimilation and supression of national minorities. The net effect of this policy was to deter development of the national languages (Lewis, 1973).

On the other hand, official Soviet nationality policy permitting self-determination in the choice of national language is stated in Article 36 of the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union, which proclaims that all citizens of the USSR have the right " to use their native language and the languages of other peoples of the USSR " (Topornin, 1980). In reality, however, Soviet language policy takes its cue from a frequently quoted article entitled "Is a Compulsory Official Language Needed?" which was written by Lenin before the Bolsheviks came to power. In this work, Lenin essentially disdained the use of coercion and compulsion in propagating the Russian language among the country's nationalities, while at the same time he lauded the "great and mighty" Russian language and observed that "people whose life and work conditions make it necessary for them to know the

Russian language, will learn it without being forced to do so" (Aminov, 1985). In another important, but less frequently quoted, statement in the same context, Lenin wrote that the "requirements of economic exchange will always compel the nationalities living in one state . . . to study the language of the majority" (Xanazarov, 1983). Herein lies the contradiction that exists between the theory and practice of a nationalities policy as employed by the Soviet Union. While the constitution of 1977 and Lenin's former statement purport to allow individual national determination in the matter of language, his latter observation implicitly promotes the Russian language and, more importantly, it suggests the necessity for literacy in the common language of the majority-namely Russian-on the part of all the country's citizens of all natinalities in order to secure the economic and political base of the Soviet state.

In essence, Soviet policy toward the various nationalities is one whose consequence is integration and assimilation under the rubric of "national in form, but socialist in content.". Each nationality is permitted to use its language and culture, but the content must adhere to the concept of a single socialist state whose ideals are promulgated in the Russian language, or in the words of the contemporary Soviet Sociologist Dr. Kuckar Xanazarov, Director of the philosophy and Law Institute of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic Academy of Sciences: "The Russian language, among other things , serves as a means of accumulating a single intellectual potential of the social community termed 'the Soviet people'" (1983: 12).

Soviet Successes in Language Planning

As a consequence of a comprehensive national language policy since the earliest days of the Bolshevik regime, the Soviet Union can lay legitimate claim to the propagation of education and bilingualism in the USSR. As reflected in a series of decrees beginning in 1917, the Soviet leaders recognize the necessity of providing education to a largely illiterate population and the benefits that would accrue in the creation of a new socialist society. One observer has noted the remarkable rise in literacy and that " between 1914 and 1969 the number of students in schools in the Soviet Union increased five fold" (Lewis, 1973: 154). In fact, Soviet data identify 1937, the 20th anniversary of Soviet power, as the year that full literacy was achieved in the Soviet Union (Isaev, 1977: 256).

Bilingualism, like education, also has been an enduring feature of Soviet language policy since the outset. However, bilingualism as defined in the Soviet context is a unique type in which only Russian is considered as a second language in addition to a citizen's native tongue. Therefore, all national groups are taught Russian as a second language, although as noted earlier, parents have the statutory right to have their children taught in their native language.

The noted Soviet linguist Dr. Magomet Izmajlovic Isaev has identified several historical stages in the application of language policy, i.e., "language construction", in the Soviet Union: (1) the improvement of old alphabets and written forms that occurred during the 1920's; (2) the transition to a Latin script and the creation of alphabets where none previously existed in the Central Asia, Volga, Siberia, and Caucasus regions during the 1920's and 1930's; (3) the transition of native alphabets to the cyrillic (Russian) script during the later 1930's; and (4) the current stage, which began during the 1940's and 1950's, to further refine the native alphabets and orthographies (Isaev, 1977: 17-19).

Beginning in the 1970's, refernces in the Soviet media, various decrees and decisions, and a series of nationwide conferences involving educators, leaders of the communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and others reflected a growing concern about bilingualism and the teaching of Russian language to the non-ethnic Russian population. The documents and speeches of Union republic leaders frequently point to the increasing necessity for fluency in the Russian language on the part of non-native Russians. Frequently these appeals take the form of advocating Russian as the language of access and advancement in modern Soviet society, as well as an "internationalizing" force for the diverse ethnic groups. The draft CPSU program published in 1985 encourages "mastering--along with the language of one's own nationality--of the Russian language, which . . . expands access to the achievements of science technology, and Soviet world culture" (Draft Party Program, 1985: 14-15).

According to Soviet statistics, the number of non-ethnic Russians who study the Russian language is steadily increasing. One source states that "in 1970, 13 million, and in 1979, 16.3 million, people of non-Russian nationalities called Russian their native language" and that "62 percent of all members of non-Russian nationalities are now fluent in Russian" ("Russian Fluency", 1983: 7-8). As a further illustration of what Soviet

language planners consider an obviously distinct achievement, Table 1 depicts the degree of mastery of the Russian language by selected nationalities in the USSR:

Table 1.

Degree of Mastery of the Russian Language by Nationalities of the USSR (in percent)

Nationalities	1970	1979
Ukrainians	36.3	49.8
Uzbeks	14.5	49.3
Belorussians	49.0	57.0
Kazakhs	41.8	52.3
Tatars	62.5	68.9
Azerbaidzhanis	16.6	29.5
Armenians	30.1	38.6
Georgians	21.3	26.7
Moldavians	36.1	47.4
Tadzikhs	15.4	29.6
Lithuanians	35.9	52.1
Turkmenians	15.4	25.4
Kirgiz	19.1	29.4
Chuvash	58.4	64.8
Peoples of Dagestan	41.7	60.3
Latvians	45.2	56.7
Bashkirs	53.3	64.9
Poles	37.0	44.7

Source: "Soviet nationalities fluency" 1982: 5-6.

A major turning point in renewed Soviet emphasis on the teaching of Russian language occurred in June 1983 at a plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, in which it was acknowledged that a poor knowledge of Russian inhibited the cultural and sociological process of a Soviet citizen. Subsequently, these concerns resulted in a sweeping reform of the Soviet education system, with implementation being introduced in phases over the next several years. In April 1984, both the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Supreme Soviet approved guidelines for the reform of general and vocational schools to be implemented with the school year beginning September 1, 1984. A major change called for children to begin school at the age of six instead of seven and to complete eleven grades instead of ten. In addition, an important provision of the reform acknowledged that

"additional measures must be taken to improve conditions for learning Russian" and that "a good command of Russian must become the norm for young people finishing secondary educational institutions " ("Guidelines for Reform", 1984: 2).

Apropos of the nationwide impact of the reform, testimonials from the Soviet press frequently describe the extent of Russian language instruction in the national, i,e., non-ethnic Russian, republic schools and the increasing mastery of Russian by non-Russians, especially in the Central Asia and Caucasus republics. For example, Professor Azim Xadziev, department head at the Institute of Language and Literature in Uzbekistan states:

> The republic has over 10,000 general secondary schools. Teaching is done in Uzbek at 7,000 schools, and in Russian --at 2,000 schools. Teaching is done both in Uzbek and Russian at more than 1,000 schools. ("Blossoming of Uzbek" 1985: 9)

Similarly, A.K. Karoypkulov, head of the Kirgiz Communist party Central Committee's Department of Scholarship and Educational Institutions observes:

> About 70 percent of the Kindergartens with a multinational student body operate in Russian . . . . And in the national [i.e., Kirgiz-language] kindergartens of most districts, Russian-language instruction has been organized in various forms for the children. ("Kirgizia Reports", 1983:. 8).

And from the Caucasus republic of Azerbaijan:

> There are 200,000 students in 428 schools with Russian as the language of instruction. Almost half of them are Azerbaijani Russian language in the national school is taught from the preparatory grade to the 10th grade [11th grade under the new reform] inclusively ("ja russkij by Vyucil", 1983: 7).

Language Planning Problems in the Soviet Union

As noted at the outset of this paper, the official Soviet view maintains that the Soviet Union has solved its nationalities and language problem on the basis of the Leninist principle of equality of nationalities and languages in the USSR.

However, the Soviet press occassionally reveals continuing problems with the nationality and language questions. Shortly after the politburo decision in mid-1983 to improve Russian language instruction in the national schools, one Soviet educator was very explicit in acknowledging that indeed problems still existed:

> The success in resolving the nationalities question -- including those in the sphere of language--do not, of course, signify by any means that all the problems caused by the very fact of living and working within the framework of a single state with a multiplicity of nations and nationalities are disappearing. The handling of language is one of the most important factors in a correct, scientifically regulated nationalities policy ("Russian Fluency", 1983: 7)

Other Soviet observers have noted that Russian language instruction continues to be unsatisfactory in many of the national-language schools, especially in the rural areas of the country; that some republics are experiencing shortages of textbooks, visual aids, properly equipped language laboratories; and, most importantly, that the institutes are graduating Russian-language teachers who have a poor knowledge of Russian and inadequate training in instructional methodologies to the extent that some secondary school students fail to master the required curriculum ("Why Tuva's Students Fail", 1985: 11-12).

Of course, limited fluency in the Russian language-the language of access and advancement in the Soviet Union-has important and disturbing implications for the country's economy, society, defense and general welfare. Certainly the military aspects of limited Russian language fluency in the non-ethnic Russian republics, especially the republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, have not been overlooked by Soviet authorities. A recent article in *Krasnaja Zvezda (Red Star)*, related the experience of one of their correspondents to a unit of the Urals Military District involved in non-commissioned officer training:

> for instance, the training of all seven [recruits] sent from the Kurgan-Tyube Oblast in Tajikistan and five of the seven sent from Azerbaijan last spring had to be discontinued because they had insufficient knowledge of Russian . . . Visits to military Commissariats in the Central Asian and Transcaucasian Military Districts showed that some had difficulty in finding the necessary number of qualified recruits ("Recruits Unqualified", 1986).

In reality, it has been observed that this lack of Russian language fluency by non-ethnic Russian recruits usually relegates them to low-prestige military units, dictates perfunctory manual labor, and disqualifies them in competing for leadership positions in the commissioned and non-commissioned officer corps (Pond, 1981: 137). Nonetheless, the problem is not limited to the Soviet military organization. The Soviet system of education beyond the secondary level is based on a series of comprehensive

examinations, which require fluency in the Russian Language, in order for the prospective student to pursue advanced technical training or professional education.

Linguistic and Cultural Assimilation

The crux of the issue is whether in the process of promoting bilingualism and eradicating illiteracy, the Soviet Union has embarked upon a course of linguistic and cultural assimilation of the non-Russian nationalities. Once again, Soviet pronouncements on matters of nationalities policy provide conflicting but revealing clues to a process of "convergence" and "internationalization" of all nations and nationalities in the USSR.

Indeed, the new CPSU program announced in 1985 signals yet another phase in nationality policy, when it acknowledges that there are "new tasks in improving relations between nationalities." The two tenets of Soviet nationality policy for the period ahead are especially revealing:

> the all-out strengthening and development of the Soviet multi-national state . . . developing a single culture of the Soviet people-socialist in content, diverse in national forms and internationalist in spirit . . . The growth and convergence of national cultures and the consolidation of their interrelationships make their mutual enrichment even more fruitful ("Draft party program" 1985: 14).

This formula for assimilation reinforces the idea of a single Soviet culture and lends credence to Western claims of Russian linguistic and cultural assimilation of various national groups through a simultaneous process of diluting ethnic identity and promoting a sense of common identity.

Soviet theorists on the nationality question use a variety of terminologies to describe their process of creating a "single culture"and a "single national-economic complex" of the Soviet people, e.g., "convergence", "internationalization", etc. The most commonly used term *sblizenie* [convergence] apparently was introduced in 1961 by Nikita Xruscev in the new party program at the 22nd CPSU Congress (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1974: 18). During the two ensuing decades the terms convergence and internationalization have become euphemistic ones in the Soviet ideological lexicon to describe what Western observers frequently regard as "Russification" and "linguistic and cultural assimilation". Speaking at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Professor Tadeusz Swietochnowski called Russification the central question for the people of Azerbaijan. He

noted that Soviet Azerbaijan is undergoing a process of increasing linguistic and cultural assimilation that is "voluntary, spontaneous, independent of the intentions of the regime, and unrelated to the political attitudes of the Azerbaijani people" ("Soviet Azerbaijan Today", 1985).

The problem of assimilation in the Soviet Union must be examined in the contet of both demography and language. In terms of demography, the USSR is a multinational state and a federation of union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous *oblasts* [regions], and autonomous *okrugs* [areas]. These four categories of administrative units were formed for the purpose of recognizing the major ethnic groups in the country. At the present time, there are 15 union republics, 19 autonomous republics, 8 autonomous oblasts, and 10 autonomous okrugs. However, the demographic dominance of Russians in a majority of ethnic administrative areas is readily apparent. Of course, the largest union republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSSR) is comprised of 82.8 percent ethnic Russians. Another of the 15 union republics, the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), has a population that is 42.5 percent Russian and 32.6 percent Kazakh (Comrie, 1981: 282). A total of 9 of the 19 autonomous republics [ASSR] are demographically dominated by the Russian population:

Bashkir ASSR	Russian: 40.5%, Tatar: 24.7%, Bashkir: 23.4%
Buryat ASSR	Russian: 73.5%, Buryat: 22.0%
Kalmyk ASSR	Russian : 45.8%, Kalmyk: 41.1%
Karelian ASSR	Russian: 68.1%, Karelian: 11.8%
Komi ASSR	Russian : 53.1%, Komi: 28.6%
Mari ASSR	Russian : 46.9%, Mari : 43.7%
Mordva ASSR	Russian: 58.9%, Mordva: 35.4%
Udmurt ASSR	Russian : 57.1%, Udmurt : 34.2%
Yakut ASSR	Russian : 47.3%, Yakut : 43.

(Comrie: 283-84)

Similarly, six of the eight autonomous *oblasts* [AO] show a Russian predominance:

Adyge AO	Russian: 71.7%, Adyge: 21.1%
Jewish AO	Russian: 83.7%, Jew : 6.6%
Karachay-Cherkes AO	Russian: 47.1%, Karachay: 28.2%, Cherkes: 9.1%]
Khakas AO	Russian: 78.4%, Khakas: 12.3%
Mountain-Altay AO	Russian : 65.6%, Altay: 27.8

(Comrie: 284)

And, finally, at the lowest administrative level, ethnic Russians significantly outnumber the eponymous population in 8 of the 10 national *okrugs* [NO]:

Chukchi NO	Russian: 69.7%, Chukchi : 10.9%
Evenki NO	Russian: 61.1%, Evenki: 25.3%
Khanty-Mansi NO	Russian: 76.9%, Khanty : 4.5%, Mansi: 2.5%
Koryak NO	Russian : 63.0%, Koryak : 19.1%
Nenets NO	Russian: 64.5%, Nenets : 15.0%
Tamyr NO	Russian : 66.9%, Dolgan : 11.4%, Nenets: 5.9%
Ust' -Ordynskiy-Buryat NO	Russian: 58.8%, Buryat: 33.0%
Yamal-Nenets NO	Russian: 46.9%, Nenets: 21.9%

(Comrie: 284-85)

The evidence of linguistic domination by the Russian language is even more compelling. Whereas Russian demographic domination through a formalized ethnic administrative structure is a feature of the Soviet period, the linguistic assimilation of nationalities has its historical roots in the language policy of the tsars. Nonetheless, it remained for Soviet language planners to structure and formalize the political and linguistic process of "Sovietizing" and "Russianizing" through Russian the languages of the approximately 130 other ethnic groups of the Soviet Union.

The initial thrust of the influence of the Russian language occurred as a result of a resolution passed in 1935 to establish an All-Union Central Committee for the New Alphabet. The purpose of this committee was to develop literary (according to the Soviet definition, these are languages that have developed a written tradition) languages, orthographies, terminology, grammar and

dictionaries for various nationalities in the Soviet Union (Isaev: 259).

In the first instance, the languages of a number of the country's ethnic groups, including those of Central Asia and the Caucasus, experienced both orthographical and phonological changes as the result of a conversion to Russian (Cyrillic) script. Isaev has noted a number of these changes in his study of national languages in the USSR: (1) the introduction of soft consonants [e.g., *Kul'tura*] in Ossetian, (2) the voiced and voiceless labiodental [v] and the affricate [c] in Kalmyk, (3) the voiced and voiceless labiodentals [v] and [f] and the affricate [c] in Turkmen, (4) the palatal voiceless [k] in Azerbaijani, (5) the phonemes [v, f ,x ,c ,sc ,z] in Kirgiz (Isaev: 361-62).

By 1940, all the native alphabets had experienced cyrillization to one degree or another with the exception of a few languages such as Armenian and Georgian. The Soviet linguists made a case for using Russian because it provided a common linguistic basis, possessed a better range of sounds than Latin, and-with 33 basic letters-required fewer additional symbols to represent the sounds of the various national languages (Isaev: 270). Table 2 [p. 52] illustrates the extent of Cyrrilic influences on the native alphabets of several major non-Russian languages in the Soviet Union.

An equally important consequence of "language construction" in the Soviet Union continues to be the "Sovietization" or "Politicization" of national languages by Russian through what Soviet linguists call "Sovietisms" or an "international vocabulary" (Isaev: 356). In this sense, the Russian language serves as a conduit for transmitting various foreign and domestic words and terminologies into the national literary languages such as: *sovet* [soviet]; *kommunizm* [communism]; *kolxoz* [collective farm]; *pjatiletka* [five-year plan]; *sputnik* [satellite], etc.

The so-called minor nationalities, the majority of which possessed no written tradition of their own, exhibit the most graphic influences of linguistic assimilation by the Russian language. For example, all twenty of what Soviet linguists call the small nationalities of the North and Siberia (e.g., Aysor, etc.) claim Russian and the remaining seven claim either Azerbaijani or Georgian as their literary language; in Central Asia seven of the ten minor nationality groups claim Russian and three Tadjik; and all four of the remaining small nationalities (e.g., Veps, Izhora,

Table 2
Some Orthographic Influences of Cyrrilic on Native Alphabets

ROMANIZED	RUSSIAN	AZERI	KAZAKH	KIRGIZ	TADJIK	TURKMEN	UIGHUR	UZBEK
a	а	а,ə	а,ә	а	а	а,ә	а,ә	а
b	б	б	б	б	б	б	б	б
v	в	в	в	в	в	в	в	в
g	г	г,ғ	г,ғ	г	г,ғ	г	г,ғ	г,ғ
d	д	д	д	д	д	д	д	д
e	е	е,ə	е,ө	е,ө	е,ё	е,ё	е,ё	е,ё
ž	ж	ж	ж	ж	ж	ж,җ	ж,җ	ж
z	з	з	з	з	з	з	з	з
i	и	и,ы	и	и	и,ӣ	и	и	и
j	й	j	й	й	й	й	й	й
k	к	к,қ	к,ҟ	к	к,ҟ	к	к,ҟ	к,ҟ
l	л	л	л	л	л	л	л	л
m	м	м	м	м	м	м	м	м
n	н	н	н,ң	н,ң	н	н,ң	н,ң	н
o	о	о,ө	о,ө	о,ө	о	о,ө	о,ө	о
p	п	п	п	п	п	п	п	п
r	р	р	р	р	р	р	р	р
s	с	с	с	с	с	с	с	с
t	т	т	т	т	т	т	т	т
u	у	у,ү	у,ұ	у,ү	у,ӯ	у,ү	у,ү	у,ӯ
f	ф	ф	ф	ф	ф	ф	ф	ф
x	х	х,h	х,h	х	х,ҳ	х	х,h	х,ҳ
c	ц		ц	ц	ц	ц	ц	ц
č	ч	ч,ҹ	ч	ч	ч,ҷ	ч	ч	ч
š	ш	ш	ш	ш	ш	ш	ш	ш
šč	щ		щ	щ	щ	щ	щ	щ
"	ъ	'	ъ	ъ	ъ	ъ	ъ	ъ
y	ы		ы,і	ы	ы	ы	ы	ы
'	ь		ь	ь	ь	ь	ь	ь
è	э		э	э	э	э	э	э
ju	ю		ю	ю	ю	ю	ю	ю
ja	я		я	я	я	я	я	я

Source: "Transliteration Tables", 1984: TT 1-10.

Karaim, and Liv) claim Russian along with either Ukrainian or Lithuanian (Baziev and Isaev 1973: 122-23). Indeed, in discussing the Soviet manipulation of languages in Southern Siberia and the cyrilliation process, the linguist Jan Knappert observes the real impact and implications of Russian for the various nationality groups:

> In this way the speakers of the Turkic dialects will be tied to Russian as the central language of the country, and will be less conscious of their relations with their neighbors.They are not able to understand them as soon as the conversation turns to a more educated subject: then Russian has to be used (qtd. in O'Barr: 6).

Accordingly, the aforementioned data are a strong indicator of the comprehensive nature of linguistic assimilation by means of Russian orthography; Soviet political, technical and economic terminology; and a written language tradition that occurs through exposure to Russian and Soviet literature.

Conclusion

Professor Bernard Comrie, a recognized scholar on languages of the USSR, offers this appraisal of language policy in the Soviet Union today:

> Current trends suggest that all but the largest, most consolidated speech-communities will probably eventually go over to Russian (or one of the other large speech-communities): with some small speech- communities this process is almost complete, but in many other instances it seems that we are in the middle of a very long process of gradual linguistic assimilation (37).

Indeed, inasmuch as language and culture are inseparable and linguistic assimilation is a reliable precursor of cultural assimilation, the evidence is considerable-if not overwhelming-that the small nationality groups have indeed been assimilated by the Russian language and culture. This same linguistic and cultural assimilation process has made important inroads into the other major national languages and only a few of the non-slavic languages, such as Georgian and Armenian, which have their own strong literary and language traditions, have managed to avoid the linguistic effects of "Russification" for the most part.

In conclusion, although the Soviet Union disclaims any official policy of "Russification", its language policy of gradual *sblizenie* of the non-ethnic Russian minorities, in fact, has all the appearances of linguistic and cultural assimilation.

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